



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency
Ideas from Youth for System Change **Spring 2012**

Every child deserves a forever family! Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever. ***Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011*** presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a ***call to action*** for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies concrete actions that we, would like to see taken by others to help us achieve permanence.

Family and Youth Engagement

Every family and youth should have a voice. Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

What you can do...

- ☐ Don't use your big system words. We don't understand and we may even agree to things we do not fully get. Take the time to explain issues to us otherwise we may not even know enough about to ask the right questions.
- ☐ We get scared or shut down when we disagree or think you're jumping to conclusions. Keep listening and give us a chance to correct miscommunications. We will share our thoughts and concerns when they are clear to us.
- ☐ We act out when we feel hopeless or helpless - help us to see there is still hope. Make sure the adults you are sending in to support us are truly invested in helping us, are non-judgmental and hopeful. When we think you are invested; we will invest too. We are not just a job!

Family Preservation

First and foremost children belong with their birth families. In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

What you can do...

- ☐ Hold each one of us accountable for our words and our actions. We are communicating with you even when we are silent.
- ☐ Let us talk to our family. It can hurt and we may get angry, but knowing what is happening is better than imagining what is happening. Know this: We will go back to see our "roots". We need to do this to understand in our own minds what is real and what is not. We need to decide what happened so we do not carry the blame and guilt. Otherwise, these bad experiences will be used as we decide on our futures. Workers: please set up plans for "what to do when..." as someday we will need to be prepared to handle the feelings that come up for us when we re-connect with family.

Placement and Reunification

Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home. When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

What you can do...

- ☐ Don't give me or my family so many chances that it defeats us. It is hard to go through this the first time, let alone to keep the drama going on for years. I am not a boomerang.
- ☐ Let me talk to someone that's "at that place you want me to go" or let me visit so my fears are lessened. Change is overwhelming, even when it is good change. We are scared and overwhelmed—help us learn to cope and not act out.
- ☐ Keep us as physically close to our families as possible so we can connect with guidance and support.
- ☐ Listen to our actions, not just the words of the adults. Not all placements are good. Not all staff are good. Not all resource homes are good. We act out when we are in places that are not good places for us.

Adoption and Guardianship

Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency. Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size. When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

What you can do...

- ☐ We know families that we fit into and we like. We are glad that you look for kinship homes first, but also let us choose a family, friends, or a supportive adult and then you can supervise us there. Being and feeling accepted is permanency to us.
- ☐ Being adopted is great! However, it still triggers a loss for us and we have mixed feelings to deal with. Let us set the time table for permanency to happen.
- ☐ Adoption is not always the answer. Too many adoptions are disrupted because people do not understand we have strong ties to our past. We do not always understand or feel grateful for what we have gone through and we need help adjusting. Loyalty is an issue for all of us. We have connections to many people and things, and those are important to us. Adding more connections is great, but that does not mean we will let go of the others.
- ☐ Support whatever home you put us in. The better you take of the adults in the home you place us, the better they take care of us.

Transitioning to Adulthood

It is never too late to achieve permanence. Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational, and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

What you can do...

- ☐ Give us good adult role models to lead us into adulthood. When we are scared, confused or conflicted we make impulsive decisions. Help us by leading us through the changes.
- ☐ Define terms and give us meanings of the words you use. Stop saying we are "on our own" and then telling us we have all these options/programs/supports. It is a mixed message and we get confused by what is "on our own" and what we "have support with."

- ❑ Help us learn about all the information on the programs available. Introduce us to the people that will be there for us once “18” or “graduation” happens. Make the parents/staff/system worker accountable for teaching us, exposing us, going with us to our areas of interest. A paper plan is not enough! Transitioning is not optional for us, nor was placement; guide us, even when we do not know how to ask you for it.
- ❑ When adult supports are identified, enlist them to get us ready. This conveys to us that we are worthwhile and valuable. We need this all the time and sometimes need to hear the same things over and over.
- ❑ Call us, text us, keep tabs on us and ask how we are doing. We do not always need big meetings, sometimes a few words of advice or support are all we need. We WANT to hear from you!!
- ❑ Keep support/advocacy groups like AMP going so we have a place to contact when more information is needed. The website is a great option, too, but help us get to a meeting if we want